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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PRETORIA 001462

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR CALLS ON ANC PRESIDENT ZUMA

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Classified By: Ambassador Eric M. Bost for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. During a cordial July 2 meeting with the Ambassador, a confident ANC President Jacob Zuma said he shared U.S. concerns about the deteriorating political and economic situation in Zimbabwe, but supported President Mbeki's approach toward the crisis. Like Mbeki, Zuma claimed that South Africa's policy allows them to engage both ZANU-PF and the MDC, and press the two sides to reach a political agreement. Zuma argued that U.S. and U.K. public pressure, including the proposed UNSC resolution, simply played into Mugabe's hands. Western action should compliment -- not complicate -- African-led efforts in Zimbabwe. Zuma said he hopes to visit the United States before the end of ¶2008. On the U.S.-South African bilateral relationship, Zuma said he was "generally happy," and said cooperation on HIV/AIDS issues was "fine." END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) On July 2, 2008, the Ambassador, accompanied by PolCouns, paid a courtesy call on the African National Congress (ANC) President -- and likely next President of South Africa -- Jacob Zuma. Since his electoral defeat of President Thabo Mbeki at the ANC National Conference in December 2007, Zuma has engaged in a comprehensive global charm offensive. He attended the Davos World Economic Forum and met with the leaders of India, China, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom. Domestically, Zuma has paid special attention to ANC coalition and auxiliary members -- the trade union federation COSATU, the South African Communist Party (SACP), the ANC Youth and Women's Leagues, and other national and provincial organs of the ANC. He has attempted to reassure domestic and foreign investors concerned that his election, supported by the most radical wings of the ANC, signaled a shift to the left in economic and trade policy. Zuma will soon meet with the Pretoria Diplomatic Corps in his ongoing effort to prepare himself and others for what seems to be his inevitable election to Head of State next year April or May.

Concerned about Zimbabwe, but Opposed to Sanctions

¶3. (C) The Ambassador opened by expressing USG concern about developments in Zimbabwe, particularly the state-sponsored violence and intimidation surrounding the June 20 run-off election. The Ambassador also expressed his appreciation for Zuma's "assertive" statements critical of the ruling ZANU-PF. He noted his substantial experience with Zimbabweans, as an

anti-apartheid freedom fighter in exile and as a Special Envoy of President Mbeki. Zuma described the situation in Zimbabwe as "a major concern for all of us for a long, long time." He acknowledged that there were differences on how best to find a solution to this crisis. The U.S. and the UK, he said, and others outside of Africa openly criticize the GOZ and apply sanctions. In comparison, Africans have shied away from publicly discussing Zimbabwe while in South Africa and the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) they "are confronting the issue," trying to persuade both sides to find a solution. South African engagement with the parties "allows access to speak frankly," he said. Unfortunately, Q"allows access to speak frankly," he said. Unfortunately, Zuma observed, the SAG cannot explain all that transpires in these private engagements, and outsiders "do not understand." Zuma said that the Zimbabweans were a difficult people to deal with -- and "if that were not so, these problems could have been solved long ago."

¶4. (C) Turning to the March 29 Zimbabwean elections, Zuma noted that President Mbeki's role led to "major contributions" that made a real difference. He singled out the negotiated constitutional and election law reforms, and emphasized particularly the agreement to post voter results at polling stations. Zuma said that due to South Africa's size, economic interests and proximity, Zimbabwe "is also our problem." South Africa's approach to this situation is based on their status as "a neighbor." The ANC did express critical views of the violence proceeding the June run-off election in recent months. He gave particular attention to when the GOZ attempted to distort the historical significance of their common liberation struggle.

¶5. (C) In response to the Ambassador's report that the USUN would table a draft resolution on Zimbabwe, Zuma said he

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discussed this approach with European leaders, most recently U.K. PM Brown. Zuma told Brown an arms embargo would be counterproductive. Instead, Zuma highlighted how trade unions and civil society organizations working outside of government successfully blocked the off-loading of Chinese weapons and ammunition destined for Zimbabwe in May. This approach -- garnering popular support -- led to SADC governments being pressured from inside not to allow this shipment to be off loaded or transported through their countries.

¶6. (C) Brown's arms embargo initiative is also problematical due to the U.K.'s historical links with the former Rhodesia. U.K. leadership of such a campaign gave Mugabe "an easy target." The U.S./U.K. vocal approach makes it more difficult for sympathetic African leaders to find a solution in Zimbabwe. The British/American call, reflected in the UNSC Resolution, includes "extraordinary steps" that are difficult for African leaders to support. Zuma noted that in Africa, "there is more than one guy like Mugabe." Zuma raised the "example" of Charles Taylor and his removal from Nigeria to the International Criminal Court despite guarantees of his safety in exile. This "is not lost on Mugabe," he said. When the U.S. or EU asks African leaders or the AU "to do this and that," Mugabe, in the context of the post-colonial era, is given ammunition to accuse Africans of siding with their historical colonial enemies.

¶7. (C) Zuma noted that the U.S. proposed UNSC resolution comes at the same time as the AU Summit statement on Zimbabwe calling for the parties to negotiate a government of national unity. As such, the proposed UNSC resolution "undermines SADC and the AU." The AU Summit in Sharm el-Sheik, he said, produced a "strong resolution" that "shows new thinking" -- "we don't want give Mugabe another excuse" to ignore it. A better approach is to "pressure the AU, not to compete with it" via the UNSC, he said. South Africa, as the SADC and now the AU's mediator on Zimbabwe, "is in a peculiar position." This will be exacerbated by international challenge to the

African approach. Zuma said he "personally disagrees" with African leaders who stay in power for more than a decade. But he appealed to the Ambassador to "let the AU deliberate and see if they have a remedy." If the AU "fall short," then the UNSC can apply additional pressure.

¶ 8. (C) The Ambassador responded that Zuma's views were well understood, but noted that the key difference between our positions was one of timing. Over the last 12 months, he said, the USG allowed the SAG to pursue mediation for common goals without public criticism. However, in light of Zimbabwe's bogus election results, and the continuing deterioration in the situation, the USG is becoming impatient. There is a perceived failure of the effort to achieve positive results. The violence, intimidation and killings continue. The economic meltdown is intensifying. Millions of refugees are flooding the region, and most of all, the situation appears to have gotten worse. If this is truly only an African problem requiring uniquely African solutions, then Africa should expect no resources or interventions from outside.

¶ 9. (C) Zuma said he understands the U.S. frustration, but Q9. (C) Zuma said he understands the U.S. frustration, but here "we part ways." He said the Ambassador seemed to suggest that "new sanctions will solve the problem when the initial set of sanctions have not worked." "Did that fail?" he asked. "Did anything work?" Zuma added: "if we handle the situation carelessly, there will be more deaths." A "degree of change" is better than creating a worse crisis and more death. "It is in South Africa's interest to solve the issue of Zimbabwe," Zuma concluded. The AU could have been more critical and made a sharper point. However, the international community has a role to play and that is "to pressure Zimbabwe, SADC and the AU." Sanctions "may not be wrong in themselves, but must compliment continental and regional efforts."

Travel to the U.S. in 2008

¶ 10. (C) Zuma indicated that he planned to travel to the U.S. and visit Washington, D.C. before the end of this year. He said he was aware that members of the business, investor, and

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political communities were eager to meet him, and Zuma was also keen to meet with them. He noted his visit to Texas in December 2007 as a positive one. The Ambassador offered that he would be in the U.S. the first two weeks of October and suggested that as a convenient time, before the U.S. elections, for Zuma to visit.

Bilateral Relationship "Fine"

¶ 11. (C) In response to the Ambassador's request for suggestions on how we could best improve our bilateral partnership, Zuma noted his view that current bilateral relations were "fine" and our cooperation on joint initiatives, such as PEPFAR/HIV and AIDS, was also "fine." He welcomed the annual bilateral forum initiative as a vehicle for developing even closer engagement. "We are generally happy" with the U.S. role in South Africa, he said. "We have no complaints," he said, "about the bilateral relationship," but there was "a feeling" that South Africa could benefit by more U.S. direct investment and private sector support. Zuma seemed surprised to learn that the U.S. was the single largest source of direct foreign investment in South Africa and its largest export market.

Comment

¶12. (C) The meeting between the Ambassador and Zuma represented a positive step in building a closer relationship with the ANC President. Despite the corruption charges hanging over him, Zuma appears increasingly likely to become South Africa's next President in early 2009. Zuma was confident and relaxed during the meeting, and showed no signs of doubt about his political future. While we were disappointed by Zuma's defense of Mbeki's failed Zimbabwe policy, Zuma was willing to listen to the Ambassador's arguments and open to further dialogue. Clearly, next year's election raises questions about the future of South African domestic, foreign and trade policies. Though Zuma gave no new insights into what one should expect from his presidency, he has not yet said what he would do except to carry out the collective policies of the ANC. Curiously, during his global charm offensive, observers note that Zuma says precisely what each audience wishes to hear. The Ambassador will continue to seek opportunities to engage Zuma and other senior ANC leaders on Zimbabwe, PEPFAR and other key USG priority issues.

BOST